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Housekeepers' Chat

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Subject: "A Handy Cleaning Closet." Information from Bureau of Home Economics,
U. S. D. A.

Bulletin available: "Housecleaning Made Easier."

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"Some women," said Uncle Ebenezer, "have no sense of the fitness of things."

"Yes?" I said mildly. "Have some hot biscuits. What's happened now?"

"Thank you -- I'll take two," said Uncle Ebenezer. "As I said before, some women have no sense of the fitness of things. When I came home this evening, I walked through the alley, and just as I passed by the big white apartment house, what should fall on my head but a shower of dust! I looked up, and there was a red-headed woman, shaking a mop out the window! Imagine that, Aunt Sammy! A red-headed woman, shaking a mop out the window on my new felt hat!"

Uncle Ebenezer looked so hurt that I hastily passed him the biscuits again. He took two more, and smiled reminiscently.

"I am proud to state," said he, "that I held my tongue, and checked the words that rose to my lips. For the words that rise to a man's lips, when a red-headed woman shakes a mopful of dust on him, are not -- well, they are not worthy of a gentleman and a scholar . . . Aunt Sammy, these biscuits are wonderful! When a man comes home from work, tired out, and covered with dust, there's nothing like a plate of hot biscuits, to soothe his wounded feelings."

I won't tell you how many biscuits Uncle Ebenezer ate, for that would be giving away a family secret. I have been glad, many times in my life, that I can make good biscuits -- they have tided me over many a precarious situation. What I mean is, if you have a big pan of piping hot biscuits ready, a man soon forgets what he intended to grumble about. Isn't it so? Not that Uncle Ebenezer grumbles, very much.

It really is a shame, that his best Sunday hat is ruined. It is on his account that I am broadcasting a talk today on cleaning closets, and housecleaning in general. Perhaps the red-headed woman will be listening-in, and if she is, I hope she takes this incident to heart, and sprinkles no more dust on unsuspecting gentlemen.

As everybody knows, one of the major operations in any home is the cleaning. Possibly the cooking, including meal-planning and marketing, is the biggest household task, but certainly housecleaning ranks high among the important jobs.

Some time ago I read an article on taking the drudgery out of housework, in which the author stated: "It seems such a futile thing to clean and clean, then to find that Johnny has trailed mud over the kitchen linoleum, that the open windows are responsible for a haze of dust, over the recently dusted furniture, and that little fluffs of dust have gathered on the floors, in the bedrooms which were gone over only yesterday! It's the constant repetition of the cleaning job, that makes it so irksome."

But housecleaning nowadays is not the bugbear it once was. If we plan our work carefully, buy the kind of furnishings that are easy to keep clean, and make provision for keeping all the dirt possible out of the house, we will not need to upset the entire household twice a year in order to "clean house."

To keep clean, rather than to make clean, is the modern practical principle. This means daily tidying of the rooms in constant use, distributing the cleaning, especially the heavy kinds, through the week, and removing dirt, not only frequently, but thoroughly, by modern practical methods. All the members of the household can help, if only by keeping their own possessions in order, and putting things that they use in place in a good condition. Easier to preach than to practice that sometimes, isn't it?

The kind of furnishings in the house, and how the house itself is arranged, and finished, have much more effect on the work of housecleaning than many of us realize. In many cases, just a few changes will soon pay for themselves in time and energy saved. For instance, a durable waterproof finish, or a covering, such as linoleum for kitchen and pantry floors, removable rugs, and smoothly finished floors, in the rest of the house, will prove an economy. Doing away with unnecessary shelves and moldings, filling up cracks and crevices in which dirt lodges, and arranging adequate storage places, will also help.

Muddy or dusty shoes and clothing are a source of dirt in the house. Much of this can be kept out by doing away with dirt walks and bare ground near the house, by insisting that mats and scrapers be used outside the doors, and by providing special places just inside where muddy rubbers and boots and coats may be left.

But no matter how carefully the housecleaning is organized, it can not be done easily and quickly without suitable cleaning tools and materials. The ideal arrangement is to have a complete set, stored in orderly fashion, in a convenient, well-ventilated closet. Whether few or many kinds are needed, it is economical to buy well-made, durable tools and keep them in good condition and grouped together if possible.

Time and bother are saved if the cleaning tools and materials are kept together in a convenient place, preferably a small closet, which can be quickly reached from all over the house. If you do not have a built-in closet, a wardrobe may be used. I don't suppose there's a long established home in the land which doesn't have an old-fashioned wardrobe. In any case, there should be holes in the door, to provide ventilation. When I planned this "Housekeepers'

Chat," I had before me a picture of a conveniently arranged cleaning closet, with soap and scouring powder and cleaning fluids on a high shelf, and brooms, brushes, and mops hanging in a neat row on the wall. This illustration is in Farmers' Bulletin 1180, called "Housecleaning Made Easier." It tells how to clean floors and walls, how to clean practically every type of furniture, and every type of kitchen utensil, how to make furniture polish at home, and lots of other things which will interest homemakers. The bulletin is free, and I'll be glad to send it to anyone who writes for it.

To return to the cleaning closet. (By the way, I should have warned you to put on your aprons and dustcaps today. This is a dusty talk.) As far as possible, cleaning tools should be put away clean and ready for use. Brooms, brushes, and mops should be hung by strings or screw eyes, fastened to the handles, so that the weight doesn't rest on the straws, bristles, or strings. Carpet sweepers also should be set so that the weight does not come on the brushes. The hair and lint which accumulates in brushes, especially in carpet sweepers, may be taken out with an old button-hook, or a coarse comb. Corn brooms may be washed in hot soapsuds, but care must be taken not to let the water rust the wires which hold the straws to the handle.

Bristle brushes may be washed with lukewarm water and a little ammonia (3 teaspoons of dilute ammonia to the quart) or borax (1 teaspoon to the quart) and then rinsed in clear water. Water is likely to injure the back of a brush and to loosen the cement by which the bristles are held in place in the less expensive makes. The brush should, therefore, not be covered with water, but should be washed by sousing the bristles back and forth in shallow water; it should be dried with the bristles down or with the weight resting on the side of the brush. The drying should be done quickly, but not in an intense heat. Drying in sunshine whitens light bristles. The weighted bristle brush used in polishing floors should be washed occasionally to prevent the accumulation of dirt and wax from darkening the wood.

Mops may be washed in hot suds and rinsed in clear, hot water; they should be quickly dried. Dry mops may be oiled or oiled ones renewed by pouring a few drops of any good floor oil into an old dish or a tin box and setting the mop on this for a day or two; or the mop may be sprinkled with a little oil and allowed to stand until the oil spreads through the strings.

Dust cloths should be washed frequently, both because a little dirt comes out more easily and because dirty ones often leave as much dirt as they take up and may scratch highly polished surfaces.

Instead of giving you a recipe today, I shall broadcast directions for making a reliable home-made furniture polish. Tomorrow I'll broadcast a dinner menu and perhaps a recipe.

This furniture polish is convenient for rubbing up various kinds of wood-work. It is made by mixing 1 part of raw linseed oil, with 2 parts of turpentine. Add a little melted beeswax if desired.

If you want directions for making floor wax at home, please send for the free bulletin I mentioned, called "Housecleaning Made Easier."

Friday: "Lines for the Stout and Stylish".

